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Reports to the Economic and Social Council

Draft report

UNDP report

1. The Administrator introduced his annual report to the Economic and Social Council (DP/2000/11), noting that it was again presented in the common format and approach adopted by UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNFPA. Work was under way to prepare a consolidated list of issues, as called for by the Economic and Social Council, in consultation with the Consultative Committee for Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ). The report was also an important part of the preparation by UNDP for the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities by the General Assembly in 2001.

2. The report covered the Secretary-General's reform and the implementation of the triennial policy review, the integrated and coordinated follow-up to United Nations conferences and summits, and special economic, humanitarian and disaster-relief assistance. Each section included major issues, highlights of achievements in 1999, problems encountered and lessons learned and recommendations for action by the Economic and Social Council. Within those major themes, sections were included on structures and mechanisms of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), funding and resources, the resident coordinator system, the common country assessment (CCA) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), harmonization of programming periods and procedures, gender-mainstreaming and gender balance, capacity-building, common premises and services, cooperation with the World Bank, monitoring and evaluation, and the follow-up to United Nations conferences. The final section on special economic, humanitarian and disaster-relief assistance set out some of the challenges faced by UNDP with its UNDG partners in addressing new crises in a timely manner.

Comments by delegations

3. Many delegations congratulated UNDP on the report, citing its analytical quality and the improvements introduced on the basis of comments made by the Executive Board in previous years. The enhanced reporting gave the Board better insight in areas where there was marked progress and where there were unsolved challenges. One delegation stated that the reports could be even more useful if more concrete proposals to the Economic and Social Council on how to solve difficulties were developed. The joint format was welcomed, with one delegation stating that the World Food Programme should also follow it in the future. One delegation stated that UNDP should provide more information on the particular role and contribution of the organization with regard to capacity-building or on the concrete contributions made in the follow-up to international conferences, allowing Board members to focus on more agency-specific comments for consideration by the Council. Speakers looked forward to receiving the consolidated

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list of issues to be discussed by the Council at its substantive session in 2000.

4. One delegation noted the lack of a reference to the Administrator's Business Plans for 2000-2003 endorsed by the Executive Board at the first regular session 2000 and his commitment to make UNDP more effective at the country level.

5. One delegation recalled previous requests for joint reporting by the funds and programmes, viewing the report as a step in a positive direction. Joining the reports of UNDP and UNFPA into one report would demonstrate increased collaboration among the UNDG members.

6. Many speakers expressed appreciation for efforts to implement the Secretary-General's reform programme through UNDG and its subsidiary bodies as well as through collaborative programming instruments. Several delegations welcomed the increased participation of United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes in the UNDG and in the resident coordinator system, and encouraged greater involvement on their part. Rationalization of the work of the UNDG subsidiary machinery was also welcomed. While enhanced collaboration and exchanges between UNDG and the Administrative Committee on Coordination machinery was welcomed, one delegation urged that the cooperation should not delay the further implementation of the United Nations reform programme through UNDG. Enhanced collaboration between the United Nations system and the United Nations Staff College Project in Turin was also welcomed.

7. Several delegations underlined the need to examine ways to improve the resident coordinator selection process, including with regard to enhancing the gender balance among resident coordinators. One speaker emphasized the need for resident coordinators to understand the United Nations system, thus calling into question the recommendation regarding recruitment from outside of the system.

8. Progress on the CCA and UNDAF was recognized by several delegations. One speaker noted that the UNDAF had been highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century" (A/54/2000). The same speaker requested further information on the interest shown by bilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations in the CCA. With regard to UNDAF, Governments of programme countries were encouraged to play a leading role in the process of defining, based on the outcomes of United Nations global conferences, an umbrella arrangement for all activities of the participating United Nations organizations in a particular country. One delegation expressed its willingness to participate in such consultation exercises when invited. Another delegation underlined that the CCA must be fully elaborated in cooperation with the Governments concerned. Another speaker noted the concern about the lack of focus on outputs noted at the first regular session 2000 and about the depth of cooperation on the UNDAF, points that were not included in the report.

9. On the topic of harmonization of programming periods and procedures, speakers underlined the role that could be played by the Executive Board in harmonizing the financial rules and regulations of the funds and programmes that would be of direct benefit to programme countries. One delegation supported the need to pay special attention to the sustainability of the harmonization measures to be taken. Several delegations requested further recommendations on joint programming. In that regard, the guidance note on joint programming issued in 1999 was requested for distribution to the Board. One speaker, expressed particular support for the recommendation contained in paragraph 31, in which it was recommended that the Council may wish to encourage members of the UNDG to address the areas for further simplification and harmonization of procedures, identified in consultation with resident coordinators and country teams, especially with regard to national execution. Another speaker encouraged countries that hosted United Nations organizations to make specific arrangements to establish United Nations houses.

10. It was underlined that the simplification of country programming processes should take into account the role of CCAs and UNDAFs in setting the strategic framework for country programmes. In that regard, one delegation suggested that the funds and programmes could initiate a discussion on the idea of submitting UNDAFs to their respective executive boards as a frame of reference for individual country programmes and subsequent collaborative programming. Some speakers emphasized that the CCA and UNDAF should not minimize the roles played by individual United Nations organizations at the country level. One delegation underlined that there

was a risk that the CCAs and UNDAFs would focus exclusively on social sectors and social development, leaving out the broader macroeconomic and sectoral considerations, as noted in paragraph 25 (b).

11. Delegations welcomed the growing cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions and encouraged them to use the CCA to formulate the comprehensive development framework (CDF) and the poverty-reduction strategy papers (PRSPs). One delegation stated that the United Nations system had a distinct comparative advantage in poverty eradication and emphasized the need to avoid overlap between the work of the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations system. Another speaker urged complementarity between the UNDAF and the CDF and the consolidated appeals process. The need for further clarification on the respective roles and division of labour in aid coordination and resource mobilization among the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations system was emphasized. One speaker highlighted the difference between the grant nature of United Nations funding and the loan nature of that of the Bretton Woods institutions. That speaker also expressed disagreement with recommendation contained in paragraph 57 (a), in which it was recommended that the Council may wish to encourage the ongoing dialogue of UNDG members with the Bretton Woods institutions regarding the CCA, the UNDAF, the comprehensive development frameworks, the poverty-reduction strategy papers and the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, stating that linkages between programming instruments must be developed only by the Governments of programme countries. New mandates for UNDG in this regard were not supported by that delegation.

12. One delegation called into question the accuracy of recommendation 70 (a) regarding the 20/20 initiative.

13. One delegation urged an examination of the trends in overall Official Development Assistance as compared with the funding of the United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes. While some delegations supported the discontinuation of the United Nations pledging conference, others underlined the need to consult with all relevant parties, within the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, before making a decision. Concern was underlined about the serious decline in core contributions to UNDP, a factor that caused the reduction in funding programmes in recipient countries.

14. One speaker urged enhanced cooperation in the area of special economic, humanitarian and disaster-relief assistance situations, with increased consultation among United Nations entities, particularly with regard to cooperation at the country level.

Response by the Administrator

15. The Administrator noted that the comments made by the Executive Board on the report to the Economic and Social Council were substantive and very useful.

16. He underlined that much effort was being put into enhancing the gender balance among resident coordinators, with the major impediment being the shortage of women among the candidates. With regard to joint programming and harmonization, he shared the view that progress must be made in this area to the greatest extent possible. He noted that the CCAs allowed the rationalization of programmes.

17. With regard to the relationship of the United Nations system with the Bretton Woods institutions, he agreed that the nature of the respective mandates must be taken into consideration although there were opportunities for complementarity. The Administrator noted that there had been progress at the institutional level in the relationship with the Bretton Woods institutions, including through talks with the President of the World Bank and the Acting Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund.

18. He noted that additional comments and questions would be addressed in the context of other agenda items and on a bilateral basis.

19. The Executive Board agreed to transmit to the Economic and Social Council, for its attention, Executive Board decision 99/20 on the United Nations Revolving Fund for Natural Resources Exploration in which the Board endorsed the plans to phase out the activities of the Fund by the end of 2000.

UNFPA report

20. In introducing the report (DP/FPA/2000/7), the Executive Director noted that it had been prepared in the joint format agreed to by UNDP, UNICEF and

UNFPA. It provided a brief overview of some of the key issues in the implementation of the reform programme of the Secretary-General and the provisions of the triennial comprehensive policy review; in follow-up to international conferences; and in humanitarian and disaster-relief assistance. She stated that in the report the Fund had attempted to provide a frank analysis of lessons learned and issues and problems requiring further attention.

Comments by delegations

21. Numerous delegations welcomed the report and congratulated UNFPA on the report's improved analytical quality. A number of delegations expressed appreciation for the progress achieved in the harmonization of programme cycles and simplification of procedures and commended UNFPA for working closely with the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) in those and other areas. Several delegations stressed the need to involve Governments in the harmonization process. Several delegations welcomed the participation of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in UNDG and stated that other United Nations organizations, should also be encouraged to participate.

22. One delegation, speaking also on behalf of another delegation, noted that the report was excellent; however, there was a slight disconnect between the "meat" of the report and the recommendations to the Economic and Social Council. The delegation offered the following suggestions and observations: How should the Council go about increasing the involvement of agencies in UNDG? On the resident coordinator assessment, should the Council be provided a score-sheet on the quality of resident coordinators and the locations/agencies where problems had been encountered? Are there examples of non-United Nations agencies using the Common Country Assessment (CCA) as a basis for programming? Since joint programming remains a difficult matter, recommendations should be made pushing this area forward. When would UNFPA and UNDP present proposals for common financial rules and regulations and joint programming and sector-wide approaches (SWAps)? UNFPA had emphasized the importance of the sectoral approach and the need for joint analytical work and common analysis. The World Bank should take measures to enable it to participate in the SWAp process.

23. Another delegation, while welcoming the joint format of the UNFPA, UNDP and UNICEF reports, regretted that the format had not been followed by WFP. The same delegation added that in addition to following a joint format, the reports should concentrate on highlighting the particular role and contribution of each fund/programme and the challenges faced. The delegation added that such aspects had been incorporated into the UNFPA report to a greater extent than in the reports of the other funds and programmes. Another delegation, while noting that the reports were a step in the right direction with regard to joint reporting, observed that the two reports could easily be joined into one report carrying the same message. The same delegation considered that to be a sign of increased collaboration among the partner agencies of UNDG, including through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), which was bringing organizations closer together and expanding the area of common ground. Regarding the recommendations to the Economic and Social Council, the delegation noted that it would be more useful to provide concrete proposals to the Council on how to solve some of the difficulties discussed, as for example in the area of joint programming. The delegation invited both UNFPA and UNDP to comment on how the development of joint proposals could promote fruitful discussions in the Council on such issues. One delegation asked how difficulties in the area of data collection could be overcome. The same delegation asked whether coordinated reviews would replace the review by individual countries.

24. One delegation suggested that the major funds and programmes initiate a discussion on the pros and cons of sending UNDAFs to their respective executive boards as the frame of reference for individual country programmes and subsequent collaborative programming. The delegation supported the recommendation that the Council urge that there be as much complementarity as possible between the UNDAF and other coordination instruments such as the World Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) and the consolidated appeals process. He added that the CCA should be prepared in such a manner that it provide a broad situation analysis for such instruments. With regard to collaboration between the United Nations system and the Bretton

Woods institutions, the delegation wondered about the extent to which words were being translated into action. He saw the need for further clarification regarding the respective roles and division of labour in the area of aid coordination and resource mobilization, both in normal and special development situations. The delegation asked for additional information on the results of the Fund's collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on the issue of integrating population and environment issues in planning and decision-making.

25. Another delegation underscored the need to harmonize programme cycles with national plans and emphasized the need to develop common data systems and indicators. Two other delegations noted that special attention had to be paid to the sustainability of harmonization measures and encouraged countries that host United Nations organizations to make specific arrangements to establish United Nations houses.

26. One delegation, while noting that it was pleased at the progress achieved by UNDAF and UNDG, noted that many issues remained to be tackled and cooperation would need to increase. Underscoring the importance of the issue of improved cooperation, the delegation requested an assessment of how the cooperation was working on the ground. Another delegation, while noting that it was satisfied with the emphasis on the involvement of the entire United Nations system in UNDG activities, stated that further streamlining was needed. One delegation regretted the slow progress in achieving complementarity between UNDAF and CDF and noted that this would impact the use of limited resources at country level. The delegation commended UNFPA support for reproductive health in emergency and crisis situations.

27. With regard to the review of the gender focal point-function in the United Nations system, one delegation requested a clarification on the UNFPA role as Task Manager in the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality (IACWGE). Concerning common premises, the same delegation fully agreed with involving appropriate external technical experts at the country level, including real-estate professionals, architects and engineers, together with designated project management.

28. One delegation stated that the Economic and Social Council was an appropriate body to address the issue of ending the United Nations pledging conferences. Another delegation noted that having a pledging conference had not raised money and suggested more "directive" language recommending discontinuing the pledging conferences. One delegation advised caution with regard to the matter of eliminating the United Nations pledging conferences and stated that the subject should be debated by the Council and the General Assembly and not the Executive Board. Another delegation pointed out that the future of pledging conferences was beyond the mandate of the Executive Board.

29. One delegation requested further elaboration on the appraisal system for resident coordinators. The delegation also requested timelines for the implementation of the multi-year funding framework (MYFF). With regard to gender balance within UNFPA, the delegation was pleased to note that UNFPA had emphasized recruitment of women for professional positions and, as a result, 50 per cent of all professional posts in the Fund were occupied by women. The delegation urged UNFPA to build on that success. The delegation also underscored the achievements of the ICPD+5 review and stressed the need to implement the key actions, as well as to monitor the implementation. Another delegation underscored the noteworthy gender balance achieved by the Fund and stated that it was a concrete response to the International Conference on Population and Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women and other global conferences. The delegation also stressed the importance of geographical balance.

30. Regarding the responsibilities of Member States to link the approval of country programmes by the Executive Board to financial contributions to those country programmes, one delegation, speaking also on behalf of another delegation, stated that it favoured such a link. Another delegation, referring to paragraph 15 (e) of the report concerning the call to donor countries to take the necessary steps to reverse the current decline in overall Official Development Assistance (ODA), stated that it had reservations about importing the General Assembly debate into the Executive Board and vice versa. While noting that the Executive Board should work on reversing the trend in declining resources for UNFPA and UNDP, the delegation observed that the overall trend in ODA was a matter for the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

31. Referring to paragraph 19, one delegation stated that UNFPA should be explicit regarding the shortcomings of the current process for identifying candidates for the pool of resident coordinators. Noting that the selection process was important, he observed that before recommending changes the cost/benefit should be analysed. With regard to the issue of increasing the number of women candidates, the delegation stated there should be career development for women compatible with their other obligations. The delegation expressed concern regarding external recruitment and underscored that to be a good resident coordinator, in-depth knowledge of the United Nations system was essential.

32. One delegation asked which countries were involved in the initiatives mentioned in paragraph 52. Referring to paragraph 54, the same delegation underscored the need to consult with Governments regarding the development of indicators.

33. Specific revisions to the text in certain paragraphs were suggested by two delegations as follows: in paragraph 21 (b) after the word "gender" add "and geographical"; in line eight of paragraph 22, after the word "partners" add "and governments"; in paragraph 31, replace the word "ability" with "right and the creation of services"; in line four of paragraph 33, after the word "information" add "; adolescent mothers should also be allowed to continue their studies"; and in paragraph 44 (b) the text should read "Encourage Governments to involve civil society in capacity-building;".

34. One delegation stated that it did not support the recommendations in paragraphs 27 (d) and 53-55 of the report.

Response by the Executive Director

35. The Executive Director thanked the delegations for their positive comments and useful suggestions. She was pleased that the Executive Board had recognized the effort invested in preparing the report. Concerning the resident coordinator system, she noted that it was open to everybody; however, the selection process was costly. Also, two female UNFPA staff had successfully completed the competency exercise but had not been placed in resident coordinator positions. She noted that a lack of gender balance in the system remained an issue. She stated that UNFPA had several excellent female staff, including some at the P-4 level, who could be prepared for resident coordinator positions for the future. With regard to the resident coordinator assessment process, she stated that staff matters were a sensitive issue and could not be discussed very frankly. On the subject of joint programming, she noted that there were some good examples of it; however, some agencies did not allow the allocation of funds to others. Nevertheless, UNFPA had undertaken joint programmes in the areas of HIV/AIDS and education. Concerning joint reporting to the Economic and Social Council, she stated that it could be done easily as long as there was an open process and the concerns and issues of each agency were taken up.

36. She stated that with regard to a joint set of financial rules and regulations for UNFPA and UNDP, the two organizations would look at the issue and she had already written to the Administrator on that matter. With reference to the United Nations pledging conferences, she observed that very few pledges were made for UNFPA at those conferences. Regarding the comment on ODA, she noted that there was a connection between ODA in general and the trends in the funds and programmes. Regarding the Fund's role as Task Manager in IACWGE, she observed that a survey of gender focal points had been undertaken. One key finding had been the discrepancy between the job descriptions for gender focal points and the actual work they performed. One follow-up action had been to examine the budget process and UNFPA was one of the organizations selected for a study being carried out by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women.

37. The Executive Director noted that at the country level most United Nations system agencies participated in the CCA and UNDAF; however, at the global level more effort was needed to have those agencies participate in UNDG. In particular, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) should join UNDG as they had a lot to offer, and UNFPA and other organizations already worked extensively with them. With regard to collaboration with the World Bank, she noted that that was ongoing. For example, UNFPA was also working with the World Bank on the Paris 21 initiative. She stated that additional resources should be mobilized to

strengthen database systems in programme countries. She added that a collaborative effort by the United Nations system, the World Bank, bilateral agencies and the European Union was needed towards that end.

38. Regarding simplification of procedures, she stated that the Fund always endeavoured not to increase the burden on UNFPA country offices and national counterparts. She observed that as good CCAs and UNDAFs became available, the Fund would be able to drop some of its own programming procedures and thereby also reduce the burden on countries. The Executive Director concluded by noting that she was just about to attend a press conference to announce a generous grant of $57 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to support adolescent reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS prevention, in four countries in Africa. She added that such support indicated that the Fund's scenario 2 in the MYFF was not overly optimistic.

Response by the Deputy Executive Director (Programme)

39. The Deputy Executive Director (Programme) thanked the delegations for their positive, constructive comments, including the favourable comments on the analytical quality of the report. She noted that UNDG had been stressing harmonization of programmes and procedures and Governments would indeed play a strong role in the process. As an example, she noted that there was a proposal for joint procedures for medium-term reviews, which would, of course, be undertaken with the full involvement of the Government and under its leadership. She observed that in the interest of time, UNFPA would respond bilaterally to some of the more detailed issues that had been raised.